



NEWS From
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MAJOR LOCAL DONATION TO OLD SCHOOL HOUSE
INCLUDES CHALLENGE FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Saugatuck/Douglas Historical Society has announced that its Old School House Project recently received a \$50,000 donation from Fitz and Thelma Coghlin, coupled with a second \$50,000 offered as a challenge to others in our area to join them in fulfilling the fundraising goal needed to bring the Project to completion this year.

Having purchased the 1860's-vintage Douglas Union School (130 Center Street, Douglas) late in 2006, using a large grant matching a successful initial fund-raising campaign, the Historical Society began refurbishing work early in 2007 aimed at preserving the building as a unique new Discovery Center in collaboration with the area's District Library and Public Schools. This year, with refurbishing well underway, a second-phase fundraising campaign was initiated to fulfill the Project's budget for converting the upper floor into rental offices for income generation, grounds development and landscaping, plus establishing an operating endowment.

Commenting on their donation, Ms. Coghlin said "the Old School House is a mighty symbol of what's special about our area. Respecting our history in educating our children will have a positive impact on our community's future, especially with rapid changes occurring all around us. So we feel it's important to help the Society get the Old School House Discovery Center opened sooner rather than later."

"The Saugatuck/Douglas Historical Society is very grateful to the Coghlin's for their donation to the Old School House Project", adds Dottie Lyon, co-chair of the Project's Task Force Committee and former Historical Society president. "Their generous support earlier helped us acquire the building, and now they're doing even more to help us reach our final goal. We applaud their dedication to our community. They've set an outstanding example of how we can all make a difference."

The new Discovery Center is envisioned as a community resource where children and adults alike can explore the area's genealogy, history, culture, ecology and architecture through recreational activities, educational programs, special events and access to the Society's growing archive of local artifacts, photos, records and newspapers. Its surrounding 1.16-acre grounds -- the equivalent of six city lots -- is planned as a "back-in-time" pathway featuring "village story stops" focusing on important aspects of local history. With these attractions, the Center also is expected to enhance the area's destination appeal in the growing heritage tourism industry.

Listed on both the Michigan and National Registers of Historic Places, The Old School House is one of the oldest multi-classroom school buildings in Michigan and considered one of the finest examples of 19th century school architecture in America. The structure served its educational purpose until 1957 and has many alumni among current area residents. Since 1962 it had been owned and carefully maintained as a four-unit apartment building by the family of Ms. Nancy J. Budd, now a resident of Holland.

More information about the Old School House Project is available on-line at the Society's newly redesigned web site www.sdhistoricalsociety.org, including floor plans and a photo diary of work done to date.

With approximately \$350,000 still needed to fully fund the Project, and targeting this summer for an opening date, the Historical Society urges more area businesses and residents to contribute toward the earliest possible completion of this distinctive community asset. Contributions may be sent to The School House Project, Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society, PO Box 617, Douglas, MI 49406.

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